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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2006

In Today's Papers

Erdogan Remarks on Turkey's Next President

All papers report that Prime Minister Erdogan told the press on his way home from Macedonia yesterday that Turkey's new President should "represent the whole country and cover all groups in Turkey, refrain from causing tensions, and lay the groundwork for unity." He shrugged off recent calls from the opposition and other groups that the new President be chosen in general elections. Erdogan stressed the ruling AK Party would name its candidate when the time comes, but added they were ready to compromise on the matter both inside and outside of the Parliament. Mainstream papers see his statement as indicative of Erdogan's longing for the Presidency, saying that the PM had described himself as the candidate for the post. Cumhuriyet and Milliyet speculate that Erdogan has implied he will not compromise with other parties in naming a candidate. The opposition CHP responded to Erdogan by saying that the new President will represent only the AKP, and not all of Turkey.

Heads of State, Government Invited to BTC Inauguration

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Zaman and others report the ruling AK Party has invited 15 Presidents including Bush and Putin and 30 Prime Ministers to the inauguration ceremony of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline on July 13.

1.5 Million Students to Take University Entrance Exam

All papers report the nationwide university entrance exams for Turkish high school graduates to be held on Sunday. Some candidates will buy wigs to hide their headscarves, which are not permitted in the exam hall, and others are going to saints' tombs to pray for success in the exam. The head of the center that organizes the exam said about 1.5 million students will take the three-hour test, with less than 500,000 passing and getting the chance for further education in universities. He suggested "baccalaureate" exams be implemented to graduate from high school, and that vocational education must be supported.

AKP, CHP Debate Draft 'Favoring' US Cargill

Hurriyet and Milliyet report that the Turkish Parliament's agriculture commission witnessed heated debates Thursday over an AKP bill which allows unlicensed facilities built on farming lands to become operative again if the owners pay 5 Turkish Lira for each square-meter. The opposition CHP said the bill was submitted solely to safeguard the interests of US food giant Cargill operating in Bursa Province on a 195,000 square-meter property, and that Cargill would pay the humble amount of 1 million Lira if the bill is passed.

Gul to Visit the US in Early July

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others: Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul is expected to travel to the US in the first week of July to meet with Secretary Rice and discuss Iran, Iraq, Cyprus, the PKK, and CIA rendition flights. Papers expect the US-Turkey Strategic Vision Document to be disclosed during the Gul visit. During his stay in the US, Gul will also make preparations for the trip of Prime Minister Erdogan to the US, a visit expected to occur in fall this year. Radikal and Zaman speculate that after returning from the US, Gul would call on Tehran without public notification in advance. The Turkish FM is expected to host his Iraqi counterpart Hoshyar Zabari before traveling to the US.

On Friday, before leaving for Almaty to attend the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA,) Gul told the press that he would visit the United States on July 5. "I hope we will release the strategic vision paper together with US officials during my visit," Gul said, adding that there was no problem regarding the preparation of the document.

Editorial Comments on Turkey's EU Process

ANKARA 00003576 002 OF 003

Cengiz Aktar, writing in mainstream Vatan, argues that the Cyprus issue has hijacked the process: "Most likely with support from Greece, the Republic of Cyprus managed to get a mention of Customs Union implementation included in the Joint Negotiations Document during the Turkey-EU negotiations for the Science and Research chapter although it had nothing to do with the content of the negotiations. The Greek Cypriot side got what it wanted; and this attempt should serve as an indicator for the rest of the negotiations -- Cyprus' revenge-seeking Turkey policy will continue all through the negotiation process and the Cyprus issue will always be on the agenda during Turkey's EU accession process. Unfortunately, the Cyprus issue did not only take Turkey's EU process hostage, but the Turkey-EU relationship as well. Neither Turkey, nor the EU can think about the overall accession process any longer since they both have to focus on the Cyprus issue."

Writing in mainstream Sabah, Fatih Altayli outlines the concerns of the Turkish military regarding Turkey's EU membership, noting that they may be obstacles difficult to overcome: "The military is not against the EU but they have concerns related to two issues: the Aegean and Cyprus. According to the military, the island of Cyprus is strategically important for Turkey, and losing Cyprus will affect Turkey's power in the region. The other important problem will come after Turkey's EU accession, the military believes. Greece will immediately increase its territorial waters in the Aegean to 12 miles. This means, with Turkey's EU accession, the borders will be lifted in the Aegean and it will become a sea of Europe, and control of the sea and air will pass to Greece. This is the biggest concern of the Turkish military. It seems rather hard for Turkey to become an EU member with these two concerns."

TV Highlights NTV (8 a.m.)

Domestic News

- A time bomb left in a trash container at a major outdoor bus station injured at least three people in Eminonu in central Istanbul on Thursday, police said.
- A terrorist died on Thursday in eastern city of Van when the hand

grenade he tried to throw at security forces exploded. Police found A-4 and C-4 explosives in his house. Another PKK terrorist was killed in a clash with security forces in the southeastern city of Mardin.

- President Ahmadinejad has removed the ban on Iranian charter flights to Turkey's Aegean province of Izmir.

- Standard and Poor's reaffirmed Turkey's credit ratings despite volatility in local financial markets. S&P comments contrast with Fitch Ratings, which on Wednesday warned investors it may revise down its positive outlook on Turkey's ratings if "there are further policy slippages or negatives shocks." S&P rates Turkey's long-term foreign currency debt at "BB-" and its short-term foreign currency debt at "B." The outlook on the country is positive. Fitch has Turkey's foreign and local currency ratings at "BB-".

International News

- EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said Cyprus and declining reforms were the largest hurdles challenging Turkey's EU entry bid. Luxembourg's Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker said EU should suspend accession talks with Ankara unless Greek Cypriots are granted access to Turkish ports and airports by the end of this year.

- The UN Security Council voted on Thursday that UN peacekeepers remain in Cyprus for another six months as UNSYG Annan acknowledged

ANKARA 00003576 003 OF 003

the impasse would not be resolved before he leaves his post at the end of the year.

- President Abbas has denied Israeli press reports that he helped in the transfer of Israeli weapons to al-Fatah.

- An Iraqi group calling itself Al-Imam Ali Brigades abducted Turkish technician Hasan Eskinutlu and his translator in northern Baghdad. The group demanded the Turkish government withdraw its Ambassador in Baghdad and halt Turkish supplies to US military bases in Iraq.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

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